

How candidates would fix mental-health system

To read The N&O series 'Mental Disorder,' go to www.newsobserver.com and search on keyword 'mental'

CANDIDATES	QUESTIONS			
For the office of governor	It is widely agreed that mental health reform has not worked. What would you do to fix it?	The state pays for a mental-health service called community support where money was spent on people who did not need mental-health treatment and where much of the work was done by nonprofessionals. What do you propose to do about that?	Some regions don't have more intensive mental-health treatment available. How do you build a provider network and increase access to treatment that's proven effective?	The state mental hospitals are understaffed, most don't have enough nurses and some don't have enough doctors. There's a question whether salaries are high enough to attract good applicants. What would you do about that?
DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATES				
 Richard H. Moore State treasurer	"We're going to have to have a publicly funded safety net clinic or clinical home where psychiatric assessments or treatment services are available. You have to have accountability in the system. It means understanding what you're paying for and why. ... If you don't build those internal intelligence functions into health and human services and its oversight of mental health, you will not run an efficient and effective program. This is not an efficient and intelligently run program."	"I would stop it immediately until I understood where the money was going. ... Why would you pay for a service if you don't know whether it was doing any good or not? We have to stop this blended payment" where providers are paid the same amount for treatment from a doctor or sessions with a high school graduate.	The state will have to subsidize care in poor, rural counties, just as it does education in low-wealth school districts. "It is preferable to create that supplement versus having those communities have to transport people to our public psychiatric hospitals."	Pay more for mental hospital staff, stop transferring problem employees and increase accountability for patient welfare through death investigations at hospitals. "If you've got positions that sit vacant for a long time or you have a revolving door, you have to face the market reality that you're not paying enough. ... We need well-compensated, well-trained people who see serving the public as a career, and that's worth paying for."
 Bev Perdue Lieutenant governor	"One of the first things we must do is develop a core list of services - a basic level of services across the mental health system. Public services, in my mind, need to be part of the array of the basic level of services where there aren't private services to meet the need." State Medicaid patients are part of community health-care networks where case managers coordinate treatment in doctor's offices, clinics and hospitals. She recommends expanding the system to include mental-health care.	Case managers who work alongside doctors and who know the patients, as they do in the state's health networks for Medicaid patients, would be the safeguards against people getting services they don't need.	"In the far northeast and the far west, you probably will never have the service providers. I think the public system has to do it."	The state must offer bonuses and offer to pay tuition for medical professionals who agree to work in the public system. "I envision a mental health fellows program ... where you pay for the cost of education in return for time served." The state universities and community colleges should establish a "center of excellence" to train mental health professionals and do research.
REPUBLICAN CANDIDATES				
 Bill Graham Trial lawyer	Patients' space in state hospitals needs to be maintained or expanded, and community hospitals need to set aside more beds for psychiatric patients. "We need to make sure we're reimbursing and have space available there." Graham said he would put a 90-day "freeze" on new rules to make sure each change is properly considered.	Cut payments for the service from \$52 an hour by \$20 or \$30. "The money needs to follow those who are in the most critical need. I think that's a generous reimbursement."	There has to be state support for mental health services in places where private providers won't go. "The people need care. If they don't get care, they're going to wind up in the courtroom, they're going to wind up in the jail, and the taxpayers are going to end up paying for it anyway."	Raise salaries. "You don't have a choice."
 Pat McCrory Charlotte mayor	Establish tougher standards for private providers and set up citizens' councils to review contracts, and possibly certify nonprofits before they are eligible for government contracts. The state should set service standards based on what disability they are treating.	Make sure only qualified companies are certified, and do extensive audits and reviews of those collecting government money. "There seems to be some pretty obvious fraud that should be investigated."	People in remote areas that don't have many local services will have to use state hospitals.	Give universities and community colleges bonuses for offering courses for nurses and other hospital workers. "We should be rewarding schools that are graduating those students."
 Robert F. "Bob" Orr Former state Supreme Court justice	"You take a few steps back and bring in all the stakeholders in the system. You go through the problems that have occurred and why they have occurred. And then you really rethink a long-range approach to the delivery of mental health services across the board." The state should reconsider whether privatization of mental health services can work. "If you look at the immediate results, the answer is 'no.' If the state decides that a mix of public and private services is best, it must have better oversight and coordination.	It needs to be closely monitored to make sure that money is going to get people necessary treatment. "We only have so much money that can be invested in this. How do we spend it in an efficient and effective way?"	Orr said he didn't know the answer, but he would rely on people who best know the mental health system for ideas. "I think you can put a plan together that includes a privatization component, or may rely on a governmentally based component."	Train more doctors and nurses and raise salaries to pay for good employees. "If we can pay the executive director of the state lottery over \$200,000 a year, then I see no reason why we couldn't pay medical professionals who are responsible for the health and safety of our most vulnerable citizens comparable salaries."
 Fred Smith State senator, businessman	Take responsibility for establishing goals and picking the right people to help the state reach them. "Clearly, there was poor execution of the plan." The state should take responsibility for long-term care, community hospitals should be responsible for short-term treatment, and providers should be told what the rules are and be expected to follow them.	"The program was not well thought through." The state needs to look at whether the service is accomplishing its goals and if it is worth keeping.	"I'm not smart enough to answer that question by myself. I can ask the right questions and we can work hard to implement what we agreed we're going to do."	Pay community college tuition for nursing students, in exchange for their working for the state after graduation, and recruit nurses from other states.

ABOUT AL-SADR

Q: Who is Muqtada al-Sadr?
A: The anti-American Shiite cleric, in his early 30s, is the son of the late Grand Ayatollah Mohammed Sadiq al-Sadr, one of the most powerful Shiite clerics in Iraq in the 1990s. The younger al-Sadr fiercely opposes the U.S. presence in Iraq and launched two major uprisings against U.S.-led forces in 2004. He ordered his fighters to stand down in August, but the cease-fire has been severely strained.

Q: What is the Mahdi Army?

A: Al-Sadr founded the militia soon after the U.S.-led invasion in 2003. It has grown into one of the most powerful armed groups in Iraq by offering both protection and social welfare services to impoverished Shiites. The Mahdi Army became known for execution-style killings and kidnappings in tit-for-tat sectarian violence provoked by the February 2006 bombing of an important Shiite mosque in Samarra. The cease-fire has reduced those attacks as well as roadside bombings against U.S. troops.
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

U.S. DEATH

The latest identification reported by the military:
■ Army Spc. **Joshua A. Molina**, 20, of Houston, Texas, died Thursday in Baghdad of wounds suffered when his vehicle encountered an improvised explosive device; assigned to the 1st Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment, Vilsack, Germany.
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

IRAQ

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virtual collapse of the August truce, which had been credited with helping bring down violence across Iraq and with reducing casualties among U.S. forces.

Three American soldiers have been killed in Baghdad in the last two days, including two Saturday in mainly Shiite east Baghdad when their patrol hit a roadside bomb. Their deaths bring to 4,007 the number of U.S. service members who have died in Iraq since the war began in March 2003, according to Icasualties.org.

In the interview, al-Sadr, whose whereabouts were not given, said his fighters' ultimate goal was to drive U.S. troops out of Iraq. "The majority of the Mahdi Army are under control. They are loyal, obedient and conscious believers," he said.

That was little comfort to Iraqis trapped in Mahdi Army strongholds. Many of them see no difference between al-Sadr's fighters and so-called rogue elements that have broken away from the group.

Whatever they want to call themselves, they are using residential neighborhoods to wage war and putting innocent Iraqis in danger, said Sadr City resident Satar Mehassin, 37, a clothing store owner.

Mehassin said he had appealed to militiamen after they planted a bomb near his home. "I tried to talk to them to tell them not to do that, because my house may be destroyed and my children may be killed," he said in a telephone interview. "They answered, get inside, or we will kill you."

But a local Mahdi Army leader in Sadr City said by telephone that he was ordering his fighters not to join the battles against U.S. and Iraqi forces, because al-Sadr had not lifted his truce.

Residents lay low

In Basrah, where masked, heavily armed militiamen ruled most streets, residents remained afraid of venturing out, even though a curfew was eased during the day.

Some residents said the Iraqi military presence appeared to have decreased as soldiers focused on specific areas, opening more streets to militiamen. But Interior Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Abdul Kareem Khalaf said that things were "going well and according to plan."

U.S. Army Maj. Brad Leighton said an AC-130 warplane fired on armed fighters on three rooftops Saturday after they had attacked a Iraqi-U.S. team. Initial reports said 16 "criminal fighters" were killed, Leighton said in an e-mail response to questions. A military statement said Iraqi forces had killed at least six additional militiamen.

On Thursday night, a Navy jet unleashed 20-mm cannon fire on what U.S. and British authorities said was a mortar-launching position.

The United States said three militiamen were killed.

Some Basrah residents said eight civilians, including five people from one family, were among the dead. The U.S. military said it was aware of the report but could not confirm it. "I can say that coalition forces make every effort to engage only hostile threats," a military spokeswoman said in an e-mail response to questions about the incident.

Eight seek to fill vacancy for lieutenant governor

Two state senators, a mayor, a city council member and a handful of lawyers are among the eight candidates vying to be North Carolina's next lieutenant governor.

The seat will be vacant for the first time in eight years.

The office is important largely because the lieutenant governor is first in line to take over if the governor

can no longer serve. And its occupant often runs for the top job after a term or two.

Incumbent Beverly Perdue is hoping to be the first lieutenant governor since fellow Democrat Jim Hunt in 1976 to be elected governor.

Four Republicans and four Democrats are vying for the nomination in the May 6 primary.

The lieutenant governor presides over the Senate and votes in case of a tie.

In 2005, Perdue cast the deciding vote for Senate passage of the state lottery.

The office may lack real power but does offer a bully pulpit and a chance to build statewide name recognition.

- JIM MORRILL, THE CHARLOTTE OBSERVER

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE CANDIDATES

The News & Observer will write about each of the candidates for N.C. lieutenant governor this week.

MONDAY: Democrat Dan Besse, Republican Jim Snyder

TUESDAY: Democrat Walter Dalton, Republican Robert Pittenger

WEDNESDAY: Democrat Hampton Dellinger, Republican Greg Dority

THURSDAY: Democrat Pat Smathers, Republican Timothy Cook

No time for a pet? Just rent that doggy in the window

BY VINCENT M. MALLOZZI
THE NEW YORK TIMES

NEW YORK - Sarah Stevenson scampered through a heavy rain one recent Friday evening, arriving at a Manhattan rental agency just before it closed.

Stevenson, a 26-year-old nurse's aide from Brooklyn, had reserved a compact cutie with a lot of spunk for tooling around on the weekend.

The man behind the counter went and fetched it from a pillow

in another room.

"Hi, hi, hi," Stevenson said with a smile that kept getting wider. "How have you been, my handsome boy? I missed you."

Stevenson picked up Oliver, a 3-year-old cockapoo - half cocker spaniel, half poodle - whom she had rented before.

"Last weekend, I didn't want to bring him back because we were having the best time," she said as she ran her fingers through Oliver's tan curly locks.

The agency was Flexpetz, which rents dogs that have been rescued from animal shelters in the hope that they will eventually be adopted. The company started in San Diego and opened in Los Angeles in June and in New York in October. It plans to expand to Boston, Washington, San Francisco and London.

"There are a lot of people out there looking for companionship," said Chris Haddix, 28, who runs the New York Flexpetz.

There are usually five or six dogs available for rent, many of them on display in the storefront window, attracting large crowds.

But it isn't cheap. A monthly membership, which includes four one-day rentals, costs \$279.95. Additional rentals cost \$45 for a day, or part of a day.

Haddix said his customers were a mixed bunch.

"There are also people who live in places that do not allow pets, and a lot of single people who

wouldn't mind just hanging out with a pal every now and then. There are all sorts of reasons for renting dogs," said Haddix, who studies the qualifications of prospective renters.

Haddix noted that big dogs are rented out on the West Coast, where the dogs generally have more room to roam, and smaller dogs are rented in New York, where, as he put it, "many people live in apartments the size of coat closets."